

14 SEP 2002

Singapore-Book

PRIDE A MAJOR BARRIER TO M'SIA-S'PORE RELATIONS, SAYS COLUMNIST

By: Salbiah Said

SINGAPORE, Sept 14 (Bernama) -- Pride is a major barrier to good bilateral relations between Malaysia and Singapore, columnist Karim Raslan says.

Many Malaysians, especially Malays, feel a sense of gnawing inferiority when confronted with Singapore's dramatic economic achievements and most Malaysians

-- himself included -- have often got to be reminded of the city-state's anxiety about its security, given its small size, he said.

"Sadly, when these two forces collide, bilateral relations are inevitably derailed. These sentiments explode to the surface in intemperate and emotional outbursts," said Raslan in his article on 'The Singapore Dilemma'.

The article is contained in his book, 'Journeys Through Southeast Asia: Ceritalah 2' -- a collection of essays -- which was launched here last night by Prof Tommy Koh, Ambassador at Large, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Also present at the launch was Malaysian High Commissioner Datuk Hamidon Ali.

To Malaysians, Karim said: "Singapore has always seemed extremely strong and prosperous. It is better organised, better managed and more efficient and so much richer. Just imagine the frustration.

"But this is no longer the case. The surprising success of the Port of Tanjung Pelepas (PTP) in Johor has startled Malaysians and turned PTP's owner, Syed Mokhtar (Al-Bukhary), into a national hero," he said.

Syed Mokhtar's ability to compete head-on with one of Singapore's core competencies -- its ports -- has altered the terms of the engagement, he said.

"Suddenly, Singapore does not look so invulnerable or so superior. If a former rice trader can figure out a way of competing against Singaporeans and successfully, others can too.

"Malaysians have finally stumbled onto a winning formula that combines cheap and well-located infrastructure, and international capital and managerial expertise," added Karim.

From Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to Ipoh-born actress Datuk Michelle Yeoh, from Islam to Indonesian rap music, 'Journeys Through Southeast Asia: Ceritalah 2' puts together the pieces of a massive puzzle that is Southeast Asia.

Born in Petaling Jaya, Selangor in 1963, Karim is a Cambridge-educated lawyer and a founding partner of Raslan Loong, one of Malaysia's leading corporate law firms.

His syndicated column 'Writers Journal' is published in various newspapers, including The Business Times Singapore, The Star (Malaysia) and Sin Chew Jit Poh (Malaysia).

He is on the International Council of Asia Society in New York and other Asia Pacific forums as well as being a regular commentator on Asian affairs and moderate Islam for both regional and international media. A Fullbright scholar in Columbia University from November 2001 to February 2002, Karim has been working on a project entitled: 'Freedom of Expression in Islamic Societies'.

Retailed at S\$12 a copy, 'Journeys Through Southeast Asia: Ceritalah 2' was launched in Kuala Lumpur on Sept 5 by Tan Sri Musa Hitam who described it as "a refreshing and alternative 'take' on Malaysia and the region".

Similar launches will be held in Hong Kong on Sept 25, Bangkok on Oct 18 and Jakarta on Oct 30.

-- BERNAMA

SS AZZ RM